

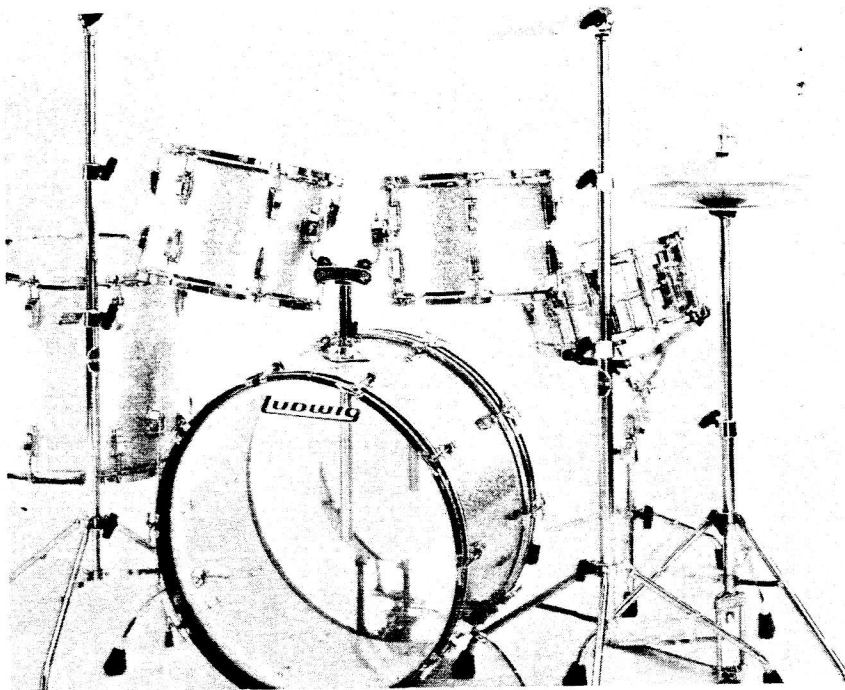
# Consumer Guide: Choosing a drum kit

by Bob Saydlowski

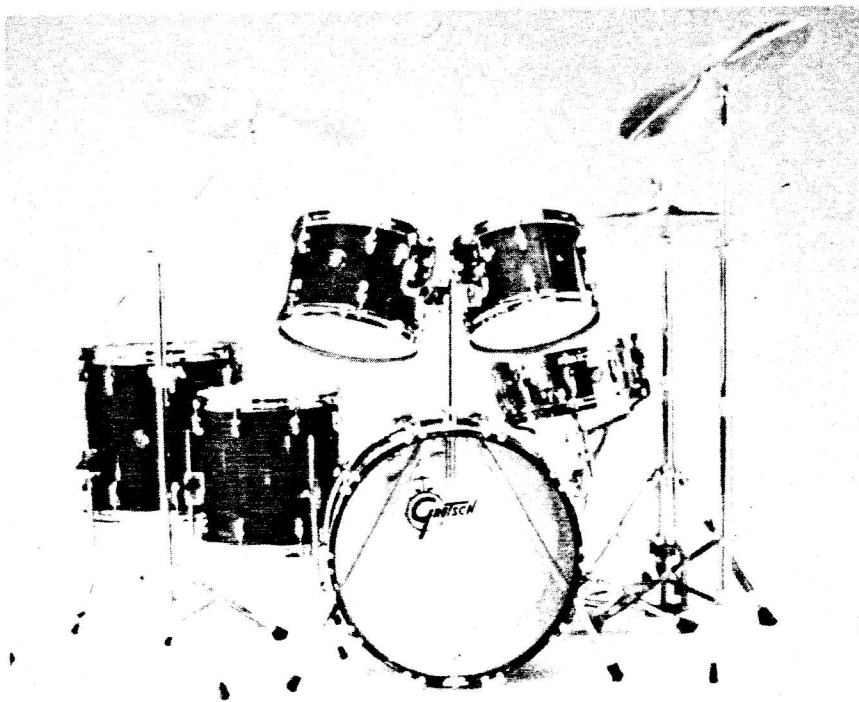
**C**hoosing a drum kit in 1981 to meet your own personal needs can be a harrowing experience. American drum manufacturers include Ludwig, Slingerland, Rogers and Gretsch. Japanese companies such as Pearl, Tama and Yamaha are making important strides in the U.S. market. Add numerous companies like Germany's Sonor, England's Premier and Staccato, and Canada's Milestone, along with many others here and abroad, and the varied choices make for a field day in the percussion department of any store. Getting all the catalogues and studying them could take quite a while. Hopefully, this article will assist in finding the proper drum kit to suit your own needs and budget.

Let's start off with the two major options: buying a stock kit from a manufacturer's catalogue or buying drums and hardware separately, not necessarily from the same maker.

Setups pictured in a catalogue are usually available at a "package" price. The most popular kits have five drums: a 14"x22" bass drum, 16"x16" floor tom-tom, 8"x12" and 9"x13" mounted toms, and a 5"x14" snare drum. Catalogue kits also include a hi-hat stand, snare stand, bass drum pedal and two cymbal stands. For example, the components in the Ludwig 989P "Big Beat" five-piece kit retail separately for \$1644, but are priced in the catalogue as a complete setup for \$1574. If you like the sizes pictured and all the hardware, this is probably the best route to go, since you can save money. Currently, an average professional five-piece setup retails for around \$1575. But don't panic, most music dealers discount list price. If you're on a tight budget, try to stay away from the "house special" no-name kits. These are usually more trouble than they are worth, and tend to sound horrible at times. Their resale value is practically nil. If you're really serious about drumming, but are just starting out, Pearl has two nine-ply wood kits in five-drum setups. The W-5 Deluxe retails at \$850 and includes all stands and pedals. Tama also makes a lower-line five-piece kit, and Rogers has just introduced the "Series II"—a kit that's almost totally plastic.



*For the beginner drummer, Ludwig's "Rock Machine"—a five-piece kit, can't be beat.*



*The more advanced drummer will have lots of room to work out on, on this six-piece Gretsch kit.*

Used drum kits also have their place. Expect to spend between \$250-\$550 for a decent name-brand used kit. Don't be embarrassed about having to buy a secondhand kit — some of us just can't afford today's prices for new instruments. Make sure that the used kit you choose is still being made, or parts will be very hard to get.

On the other hand, if you can afford the cream of the crop drum kit, Sonor makes its special Signature series kits with 12-ply shells of exotic woods. A six-piece set lists of \$5750.

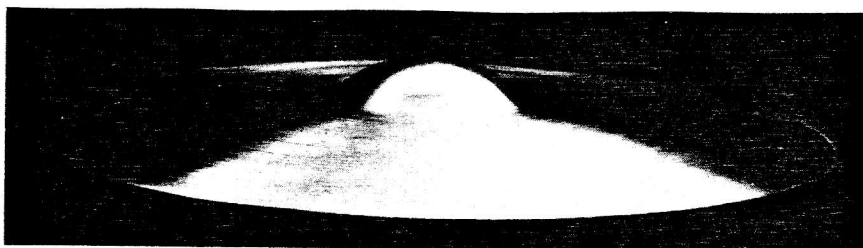
The big battle between companies is the number of wood plies in the shell. It's claimed that the thicker and heavier the drum, the better it sounds. Personally, that theory is disagreed with. A well-built quality drum will sound good no matter if it's three-ply or 20-ply. Drum sizes cover the spectrum from bongot-type concert toms with a six-inch head to 26-inch bass drums. The current rage is extended-depth drums. The usual bass drum depth for years has been 14-inch, but Ludwig, Pearl and Slingerland make 16-inch depths as well. "Power toms" are also getting popular — regular diameter tom-toms with their shells extended a few inches. If you want deeper-pitched drums, these would probably be best for you. Keep in mind that double-headed drums are better than single-headed ones. You can get increased tuning capabilities along with a more resonant tone. And if you ever want single-head drums, just remove the bottom heads. Drilling holes in a single-head drum to fit hardware for a bottom head can be expensive as well as risky.

Cymbal stands have double or single braced legs. When shopping for a cymbal stand, be sure to choose one whose tilter works easily and can hold large cymbals. Be sure the stand will extend to the height you need, yet be sturdy enough not to tip over. Best buys include Pearl's 800 and 900 Series and Rogers's memory lock-equipped stands.

Tom-tom holders are getting larger with the capability of mounting more drums on the bass drum. Pearl, Yamaha, Rogers and Tama are some companies making "modular type" mount holders. Ludwig's recently-introduced Set-Up can hold up to six tom-toms on one single bass drum. The whole idea behind modular holders is to place the drums where you want them to be.

When buying your bass drum pedal, try out the pedal to make sure it feels right for you. The most popular are Ludwig's Speed King and Ghost Pedals, and Pearl's 800 series pedal.

As for cymbals, most basic setups use a pair of 14" hi-hats, an 18-22" medium



Lynn Goldsmith/LGI



Lynn Goldsmith/LGI

(Top to bottom:) Despite competition from the Paiste company, Zildjian cymbals remain the top of the line. Different strokes for different folks: Old pro Ginger Baker plays a set of Ludwigs, while the Stones' Charlie Watts insists on Gretsch drums. Stewart Copeland of the Police commands a Tama kit.

ride, and a 16-18" crash cymbal. Zildjian and Paiste are the most used cymbals.

Talking with other drummers and browsing in well-stocked music shops can help you make your decision about the right drum kit. Drummers are an unfortunate lot, though. Most other drummers can try out instruments right in the store, but testing drums in a music shop is usually impossible. Most dealers don't want the added noise and headaches. Be-

sides, acoustics in a music shop will certainly not match the acoustics of a club. And types of drumheads different than what come fitted to the drums will make a great difference in the sound.

Considering all the choices available, picking a drum kit can become complicated at times. But when you walk into a music store to make that Big Purchase, the more knowledge you're equipped with, the easier it will be for you.